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ABSTRACT

Teachers can develop reflection and evaluation options by keeping a classroom journal. A classroom journal is a record of the teacher's experience within the classroom itself, as well as experience outside the classroom which bears on classroom life. As an observor of one's own actions and reactions to classroom incidents, the teacher opens the possibilities of reflection and redirection of teaching behaviors based on a systematic and continuous written record. Two suggested organizing principles and sections of a classroom journal are: (1) positive elements in the classroom; and (2) frustrating elements in the classroom. There are numerous historical precedents for journal writing. By keeping a journal, the teacher may view himself as the one best resource for a particular activity at a particular time. Keeping a journal is an attempt to make teachers reflect on their experience and give it meaning. (JM)

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USING A JOURNAL TO DEVELOP REFLECTION AND EVALUATION OPTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

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by

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USING A JOURNAL TO DEVELOP REFLECTION AND EVALUATION OPTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

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A good deal of educational literature has focused on the pre-active phase of teaching, teacher planning, and teacher thinking (Clark and Yinger 1977, Yinger 1977, Shavelson and Stern 1981). Little has been written on the post active or evaluative phase of teaching. While preactive planning is a critical feature of teaching, the post active reflection upon classroom activity is as worthy of discourse and development. This paper will describe and explain how and why a teacher might develop reflection and evaluation options by keeping a classroom journal. A basic assumption which guides this paper is that the teacher may be her or his own best resource in the classroom. In other words, rather than dependence on someone else for answers to what and how to teach, the teacher can determine what and how to teach. This assumes that the teacher is an active, thinking, individual open to processing new information and making choices for better teaching. For the sake of argument, let us agree on that and proceed with the topic at hand.

WHO MIGHT KEEP A CLASSROOM JOURNAL?

Keeping a classroom journal is not for everyone. It is a time consuming technique which requires creativity, discipline, patience, and willingness to reflect back on what is said and done in the classroom on a daily basis. It requires commitment and the desire to search for meaning in the everyday activities of life in classrooms. Furthermore, it requires effort. The effort in turn forces one to reflect back on the written word, presumably to find recurring patterns in one's actions and statements which affect what happens in the classroom. This has the potential effect of improving one's teaching by focusing specifically on what and how to teach, on a daily basis.

KEEPING A CLASSROOM JOURNAL

Keeping a classroom journal does not refer to a simple listing of activities or a log of time, dates, and places. Rather a classroom journal is a record of the teacher's experience within the classroom itself, as well as experience outside of the classroom which bears directly on classroom life. The journal may be a record of thoughts, actions, beliefs, and attitudes. It has the potential of evoking growth and development in a teacher's professional and personal life. In the journal, the teacher is both the observed and the observer writing both a private story and a public chronicle of classroom life at a particular point in time. At any given point in the classroom journal every variation of being may be represented: thinking, acting, feeling, daydreaming, rejoicing, regretting, doubting, and self-accusing, for example.

While keeping a classroom journal entails some deeply personal elements of the journal writer's experience, the basic focus involves the behaviors and activities of daily classroom life. The teacher who keeps the journal is a clinician documenting one's own case history. As an observor of one's own actions and reactions to classroom incidents, the teacher opens the possibilities of reflection and redirection of teaching behaviors based on a systematic and continuous written record. As a teacher begins a classroom journal, I am proposing two organizing principles and sections of a classroom journal:

1) Positive Elements in the Classroom:

   This section deals with the enjoyable rewarding, uplifting moments in teaching and classroom life. In a recent in-service session with teachers on this topic, one teacher listed a description of how she was able to change one child's behavior from not bringing homework in to bringing homework in regularly.

2) Frustrating Elements in the Classroom:

This area deals with the problems, areas of conflict and tension and interpersonal dilemmas in the classroom. Recently, a teacher recorded a problematic incident with the school principal which greatly affected the teacher's own teaching behavior.

This structure provides a foundation for the classroom journal. Once these divisions are in place, the next step to be dealt with is setting aside time for the journal. Each person needs to tailor a time to her/his own needs. For example, one teacher recently told me that she only had twenty minutes after school in her classroom to do this. Another teacher found up to an hour in the evening at home to write. In both cases, the teachers in question actually kept to these times at least four days per week. Again, the issue of commitment to the task of journal writing and involvement in this task is recalled. Teachers at a recent in-service session raised the question of how one goes about keeping a journal. Many fine models can be found in the history of literature and psychology.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

While people have probably kept journals throughout history for various reasons, some of the first known collection of journals were written in the 10th Century by ladies of the Japanese court. Often the writers would hide their journals under pillows and these journals were referred to as "pillow diaries." The diaries went beyond the daily record of life. They were documents recording dreams, hopes, fantasies, feelings, and innermost thoughts. Next, the Renaissance brought with it an era of diary and journal writing publicly recording the spirit of the rebirth of the time in personal terms case by case.

The 1660's brought us one of the best known journal keepers in history, Samuel Pepys. His nine years of writing described and accounted for his life, his relationships with people and the politics and atmosphere of London. His

thick descriptions of the problems of the Church of England, the information on the Navy in which he served, the Anglo-Dutch War, the Plague, and the Great Fire are brilliant examples of literature and historical record.

Pepys dilligently set aside time each day to write in "the journal." He kept it under lock and key for it was for him an extremely private enterprise. There is evidence that he read and reread his daily entries sometimes rewriting them as needed. He went so far as to develop his own shorthand so that people would not be prompted to read his very personal observations. Pepys wrote with vitality, humor, honesty, and humility. He had trouble with his eyes and for a time thought he was going blind, so he stopped writing in 1669 after nine years of dedication to the task. Oddly enough, the first edition of Pepys' diary did not appear in print until 1825, followed by new editions and reissues in the 1890's. It was at this time that the Victorians focused on both letter writing and journals.

Prior to the Victorian era, a number of religious groups kept spiritual journals. The Quakers began writing journals in the 17th Century, usually describing their spiritual progress. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, kept volumes recounting his symbolic relationship with God. His great trust, his doubt and uncertainty, and his validating of himself were records of the Puritans keeping prolific diaries. The journey on the Mayflower was eloquently described in journal form. For these poeple, the journal became an outlet for all the fears and moments of despair of that long and difficult voyage. The use of the diary as a type of spirtual outlet developed into a political outlet as well. For example, the French Revolution produced journals called "journals intime." The "journal intime" was a rather personal display of a person's conscience and a revelation of deep feelings of patriotism and even nationalism.

In our country, the Westward expansion was characterized by journal writing undertaken by women in covered wagons. Tristine Ranier, in "The Diary"

cited by Huyghe (1981), writes of this time:

> "So many women relied on the diary to preserve their history and their culture that 200 years later many people had come to think of the diary as primarily a womens' mode of expression."

Indeed, from the days of the covered wagons to contemporary writers such as Andrea Lee (1981), in her Russian Journal, women have made significant contributions to the art and craft of journal writing.

Perhaps the two most renowned writers who kept journals during their lifetimes are Anne Frank and Anais Nin. The Diary of Anne Frank and the multiple volumes of The Diary of Anais Nin are published in numerous languages. The vivid and penetrating insights of Anne Frank, while she, members of her family, and friends went into hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam in 1942, stand boldly in literature and as poignant documentary of that period in history. Likewise, for more than thirty years, Anais Nin's journal is a passionate, detailed description of self-discovery.

For example, Anais Nin wrote this about herself when asked about her life as an artist:

> "What I have to say is really distinct from the artist and art. It is the woman who has to speak. And it is not only the woman Anais who has to speak, but I who have to speak for many women. As I discover myself, I feel I am merely one of many, a symbol. I begin to understand women of yesterday and today. The mute ones of the past, the inarticulate, who took refuge behind wordless intuitions, and the women of today, all action and copies of men. And I, in between...." (1931)

One of her entries in the mid-30's explains her attitude to the outside world and the function of her journal:

> "What makes people despair is that they try to find a universal meaning to the whole of life, and then end up by saying it is absurd, it is illogical, empty of meaning. There is not one big cosmic meaning for all, there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, an individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each person...I have made myself personally responsible for the fate of every human being who has come my way." (1931-1934)

She describes what her journal meant to her in this way:

> "I only regret that everybody wants to deprive me of my journal, which is the only steadfast friend I have, the only one which makes my life bearable, because my happiness with human beings is so precarious, my confiding moods rare, and the least sign of non-interest is enough to silence me. In the journal I am at ease." (1933)

For Anais Nin, the journal was indeed representative of her growth and development, her "most natural, most truthful" writing. Her diary is a passionate description of her journey to self-discovery and self-reliance.

Literary and historical figures are not the only journal writers. The field of psychology has long made use of journal writing as a therapeutic aid. The cathartic function of journal writing has been widely recommended by many therapists. They see the writings of a journal as an attempt to bring order and coherence to one's range of experiences. Behaviorists, Cognitivists, and Jungian Analysts have used journals as part of the process of therapy. The journal is seen as a natural outgrowth of the clinical situation in which the client is encouraged to speak to her/himself. Most recently, Ira Progoff (1963) has written of a "psychological workbook" and later (1975) about an "intensive journal." Progoff has developed a set of techniques which provide a structure for keeping a journal. He himself is a therapist who has conducted workshops on keeping an intensive journal for the purpose of establishing and strengthening the integrity of the individual person. The intensive journal is a reflective, in-depth process of writing, speaking what is written, reflecting and, in some cases, sharing what is written with others. Feedback is an operating principle of keeping an intensive journal for Progoff which he believes is critical for an individual. The individual needs to draw upon her/his own inner resources to become a whole person. The journal systematically aids the person to reopen the possibilities of living. Progoff (1963) reminds us that intense involvement and personal commitment are necessary to establish a new atmosphere of inward reality. He advocates:

a) Regualr face-to-face consultations in dialogue to explore the individuality of the psyche.

b) Maintenance of an intensive journal, a sort of psychological workbook to keep a record of all the varying contents and encounters on the depth level of experience.

c) Some type of sharing in groups or with other individuals who have also embarked on the path of personal growth.

The Progoff method of keeping an intensive journal makes use of a special bound notebook divided into numerous categories which provide the structure for the journal. The sections relate to all components of the person. There are sections, for example, on "dreams," "stepping stones," sections for "dialogues," including dialogues with persons, events, work, and the body. The person is asked to reflect, free associate, meditate, and imagine in order to write that which truly reflects her/his experience. The psychologists have provided us with a good clinical model and a concrete technique, journal writing, to improve ourselves as persons.

Through history and through the field of psychology, a reminder is ever present that the path of growth and development take time, commitment, and involvement. Each of the writers mentioned in this article share the conviction that undertaking the writing of a journal is extremely beneficial and extremely demanding. The cost is minimal for a pen and paper. However, the freeing up of time and commitment to improving oneself are both necessary in the undertaking of keeping a journal and certainly for a classroom journal.

DRAWBACKS

Some writers caution against journal writing for a certain percentage of the population. Albert Ellis thinks journal writing may do more harm than good. The journal may lock people in circular attitudes and behaviors. If

the journal becomes circular, it may cuase the writer to focus only the gloomy aspects of life without balancing the healthy and positive aspects. For this reason, I propose the two major categories of 1) Positive Elements in the Classroom and 2) Frustrating Elements in the Classroom. For the teacher suited to journal keeping, the two broad categories offer ample opportunity to balance the positive with the negative. Furthermore, the two categories are broad enough to allow the journal writer flexibility in developing sub categories or altogether new categories. One teacher, for example, recently suggested a category of "Personal thoughts about teaching as a Profession."

REFLECTIONS ON REFLECTION

The keeping of a classroom journal forces the teacher to assume a posture of reflection. The written word, in a sense, becomes a confrontation. The teacher sees in writing descriptions of and reactions to every day life in classrooms. The teacher records feelings and thoughts as well. The journal becomes a self monitoring outlet and may become a vehicle for redirection and change, if that is warranted. By keeping a written record of experience, the teacher may view her/himself as the one best resource for that particular activity at that particular point in time. By beginning the journal with a structure of two categories; 1) Positive elements in the Classroom and 2) Frustrating elements in the Classroom the teacher has a starting point, for keeping a written history of life in the classroom. Furthermore, the journal may be thought of as assisting in the process of teacher self evaluation. The journal offers the teacher an opportunity to review one's own actions and statements over time in a very personal manner. Reflection and self evaluation remain part of our lives as teachers in varying degrees at various points in development. With the simple tools of pen and paper, keeping a classroom journal is a straightforward attempt to make us reflect on our experience and give meaning to it in a positive, informed, and enriching manner. The classroom

journal is a useful device for assisting the individual in the daily challenge of teaching; the challenge of deciding what and how to teach.

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